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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [KN](#) [GM](#)  
SUBJECT: GERMAN AMBASSADOR TO DPRK ON SUCCESSION, 150-DAY  
BATTLE

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

#### Summary

1. (C) During a recent meeting with Ambassador Stephens, Germany's ambassador in Pyongyang, Thomas Schaefer, asserted that military hardliners had seized the initiative while Kim Jong-il (KJI) was recovering from his stroke and are now ascendant in the DPRK government. According to Schaefer, conventional wisdom among Pyongyang-based diplomats is that the leadership handoff between KJI and Kim Jong-eun (KJE) is proceeding smoothly but in a lower-profile manner. Schaefer mocked the "150-Day Battle" campaign, which appeared to have only "increased the suffering of the people." Schaefer said that anecdotal evidence over the past few months suggested that trade between China and the DPRK was cooling. He cautioned against believing that North Korea would collapse soon, emphasizing that life is "quite nice" for regime loyalists in Pyongyang. End summary.

#### Military Hardliners in Ascendancy

2. (SBU) During a recent meeting with Ambassador Stephens, German Ambassador to the DPRK Thomas Schaefer provided his take on the current state of the North Korean political scene. Schaefer has served in Pyongyang since 2007. He said it was clear that military hardliners had seized the initiative while Kim Jong-il (KJI) was recovering from his stroke and are now ascendant with the DPRK government. The military, he claimed, was behind the stricter internal movement controls implemented in September 2008; the hardliners would not agree any time soon to lift what Schaefer characterized as the "internal tightening."

#### Succession is Set

3. (C) According to Schaefer, conventional wisdom among Pyongyang-based diplomats is that the leadership handoff between KJI and Kim Jong-eun (KJE) is proceeding smoothly but in a lower-profile manner. "Everyone in North Korea knows" that KJE will be KJI's successor and the news has "settled in" with the populace, Schaefer asserted. DPRK propaganda authorities were, however, no longer highlighting the succession issue because it could be perceived as weakening KJI's authority. Schaefer related that a North Korean official had told him that KJE was given a seat in parliament in March after "running" in district 216 -- KJI's birth date -- under the name Kim Jong.

#### 150-Day Campaign

¶4. (C) Schaefer ridiculed the North's "150-Day Battle" campaign, which he said was publicized with banners and posters "on every corner in Pyongyang." The entire country, he noted, seemed to be mobilized to attempt to produce more by working longer hours; the only real result of the campaign, Schaefer related, appeared to be the "increased suffering of the people." The campaign, he noted, also had an austere edge. For example, he said that local staff at the German Embassy refused to participate in a small party to celebrate the completion of a pavilion on the embassy compound, insisting that their participation would be "inappropriate" during the campaign.

Trade with China Down?  
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¶5. (C) Shifting to the North Korean economy, Schaefer said that anecdotal evidence over the past few months suggested that trade between China and the DPRK was cooling. He explained that he makes monthly trips from Pyongyang to Sinuiju, which is linked to the Chinese city of Dandong by a one-lane Japanese colonial-era bridge. Schaefer said the bridge, which only has one lane, has been closed on weekends due to slowing trade between the two sides. In addition, Schaefer related that the Sinuiju-Pyongyang road has been "mostly empty" of vehicles carrying goods back from the border, a common sight earlier in his tour.

No Imminent Collapse  
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¶6. (C) Schaefer cautioned against believing that North Korea would collapse soon. For regime cronies in Pyongyang life

was "quite nice"; the electricity was on regularly and "friends of the revolution" -- those permitted to live in the capital -- had access to a lot of amenities. "Enemies of the revolution" generally lived in rural areas and suffered extreme poverty. Rather than bubbling with resentment, Schaefer said he found people in the countryside resigned to their collective fate, not demonstrating any discontent with the regime.

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